



Hannah Till:

Good day to you.

My name is Hannah and I am a cook here in the General's household. And might I inquire why you are standing idly by in the doorway of my kitchen?

Ah, you must be here to inquire after the position of day servant. As you can see, we need every hand we can hire. Mrs. Thompson, our most worthy housekeeper, hires and fires the help here. At the moment she is at the camp market with my husband Isaac, also a cook, purchasing the fresh vegetables and fowls we require for this day's meal. They should return soon. His Excellency is most particular in his demands that dinner be served to his company at 3 o'clock. We in the kitchen are all busy now – chopping, stirring, boiling, and roasting to get up a meal for as many as thirty.

That is the way it has been every day since I joined His Excellency's family. For almost two years now I have been a part of the General's household, from the day I was hired out from my master in New York to serve as cook. I have been at all the celebrated battles and witnessed the near victories this army has experienced. I have cooked in households of privilege before – since I was a young slave of 15 – but I must admit that the experiences of war make cooking for the General different.

There are privileges of course. The general makes certain that his staff is well-clothed and his military family well-fed, paying expenses from his own pocket. As Commander in Chief and a gentleman he has a standard to uphold. I and the domestic staff help him maintain a semblance of civility and order in these times.

However there are also the hardships. When there is no food to be had in camp, there is none for private or general. There are times our household has been reduced to mere ration and we have had to barter for food for His Excellency's table. Those times, most fortunately, have rarely lasted long, and though another crisis usually arrives short on the heels of the first, we have come to see it as "suffering as usual."

And then there is the constant movement. Due to the uncertainties of war, we have moved 49 times from the time we first engaged the enemy at Trenton and Princeton last January to the time we settled here at the Potts House in December. Fort-nine times! Conditions varied at each quarters. I never knew whether I would have a spacious, well-appointed kitchen or a camped, crowded one as here. And always we had to be prepared to go at a moments warning.

Yet we persevere. His Excellency inspires his men, staying here among them, not going home through the winter campaign. There is a longing – very strong – to do whatever is necessary to secure our injured country's freedom. I, a slave, know how it is to dream, and strive, and hope for freedom. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is the tree of life. We all, master and servant, enslaved and free, must strive to serve and do our part.

Well, that meal is not going to cook itself with me here talking to you., I must return to my duties. Good Day to you!